

NOTES ON READING STRATEGIES

These suggestions are intended to give you a number of predictable strategies you can use to "get into a text" in order to begin an analysis. They are tools in the toolbox.

1. **Terms and concepts:** *read with a dictionary*

What are the important terms and concepts in the text? How does the author define them? Is this definition different from the conventional one? If so, why? What is the effect of the shift in terms of the article's purpose or argument?

2. **Genre, conventions:** *each genre has conventional ways of communicating*

What genre is this text? Why did the author choose to articulate her concerns in this genre? What does this genre provide that another would not? What are the specific conventions, reading strategies associated with this genre that will help me to make sense of it?

3. **The Map:** *an outline of the main points, an overview of the argument's structure, a "plot summary"*

What are the main arguments of the text? Why has the author chosen to present these arguments/insights in this particular *order*? What are the major *movements* of the text?

4. **Thesis:** *The 'heart' of the text, its **explicit** position, statement of concerns (in a literary context, this may be the "theme")*

What point does the text make? What kinds of evidence does s/he use to support/illustrate this point (eg. Anecdotal, scientific, theoretical, poetic)? Why does the author choose this particular type of evidence? What assumptions underwrite the text's position?

5. **Reaction: the first phase of analysis (the start of the SO WHAT process):** *your 'gut reactions'; always ask WHY do I respond this way? What made me think that?*

What is my reaction to this statement/article/text (eg. Anger, sympathy, agreement, confusion...)? Why do I respond this way? What *precisely* in the text causes this response (language, underlying assumptions, form, tone, the topic as a whole)? What *precisely* in myself causes this response (experience, previous assumptions, knowledge from other sources, identity or concerns or interests or investments)? What knowledge do I bring to this interchange between the text and myself that might "fill in the blanks" in the text, or challenge the text in some way? What new perspective or information does the text provide that might "fill in the blanks" or change my own position/perspective/understanding?

6. **Articulation: the second phase of analysis (or, Why I think this about the text):** *your position, the text's **implicit** position*

What are the underlying assumptions of the text? What is the position or argument of the text? What patterns in the text reveal these underlying assumptions or position? What is my own position with regard to the topic as a whole? With regard to this particular discussion of the topic? What has the text articulated well? What is left out that I feel is important or that I feel will have implications for the argument?

7. **Patterns, organization: the third phase of analysis: *synthesis***

What is the main point I want to make about my reaction to the text's position/argument? (This will begin with a simple like/don't like, agree/disagree statement at first, but will become more complex as you get better at thinking about your own processes of analysis and response) What specific points, examples, statements, terms will help me to illustrate this general position? What are the overall implications of my position? How does it illuminate, change the terms of, critique, explain, the argument? Am I saying something important? Is my position just about *me* or is it developed from a clear understanding of the text itself?

EG. "I like microwave pizza" is an opinion that tells a reader only about your preferences. "Microwave pizzas are healthy because..." or "Microwave pizzas illustrate our dependence upon convenience at the expense of nutrition because..." are statements about the pizzas. These are statements that illuminate the underlying values that determine how pizzas are understood and used in the world. The first example is just an opinion; the second two examples are the beginnings of an *analysis*.

Opinion is useful *only to you* and it *cannot be disproved* (no one can tell you that you *don't* like microwave pizza). An *analysis* is *about the text* and the world and it can *be disproved* (someone could argue that pizzas are in fact nutritious, or that convenience is not necessarily detrimental to nutrition).

Your job is to consider all the ways that your position can be disproved and either account for those challenges or change your position in light of them. You want to make your reading as unassailable as possible by developing a deep understanding of all aspects of the text.

8. **General Questions: *contexts, implications***

How does this article/text relate to the other texts we've looked at recently? How does it relate to the overall theme that these texts have in common or to the general topic we are studying? Do they challenge what I know? Do they challenge what other texts say? Are they making the same argument but coming at it differently, using different strategies or materials? What is significant about these differences? Do they use the same material but develop different conclusions? If so, what allows them to do so? Is it their underlying assumptions? How do these texts relate to my own experience, worldview, understanding of the topic? What problems do these texts confront? What solutions (if any) do they offer? What do I find useful, confusing, contentious? What questions am I left with?